

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

4 October 2013

Europe

Pay strike at Poland's Gdansk shipyard

Up to 700 workers at the indebted Gdansk Shipyard in northern Poland walked off the job last week to demand unpaid wages.

Karol Guzikiewicz, the leader of the shipyard's Solidarity union, said that August's pay had not arrived as had been promised.

According to Associated Press, the shipyard's workforce of around 2,000 have been paid on an irregular basis since May, while its two shareholders cannot agree on the way to save the yard.

The company is 75 percent Ukrainian owned, with the remainder held by a Polish state agency.

The Gdansk Shipyard once employed around 14,000 workers and was where the Solidarity union was founded in the 1980s.

Strike vote at Scottish oil refinery

More than 80 percent of the workforce employed at PetroIneos' Grangemouth refinery in Scotland voted in favour of industrial action last week over the treatment of a union organiser.

Stephen Deans is being investigated by the company over whether his political activities with the Labour Party contravene company policy.

The strike raises the prospect of North Sea supply disruption and a price spike for the Brent oil benchmark.

Steam from the 210,000 barrel-a-day refinery powers the adjoining Kinneil terminal, which receives oil from a pipeline carrying North Sea Forties crude.

Forties is one of the four crudes that make up the UK's Brent BFOE global oil benchmark, along with Brent, Oseberg and Ekofisk.

One trader told Reuters that the strike vote "could be very bullish for Brent due to the Kinneil tie-up with the refinery."

A strike at the refinery in 2008 led to the temporary closure of the North Sea Forties pipeline, sending US and UK crudes to new highs of \$120 and \$114 per barrel respectively, as well as raising

gasoil futures to record highs and resulting in queues at petrol stations around Scotland.

The Unite union's regional secretary for Scotland, Pat Rafferty, told Reuters that a decision would be taken this week on the next steps for industrial action. The company said that the investigation into Deans would be completed by October 25.

According to upstreamonline.com (the International Oil & Gas newspaper): "Relations between the workforce and Ineos, already strained by the investigation into Deans, were put under further pressure after comments about the future of the chemical plant.

"[Ineos Petrochemicals chair Calum] MacLean said last week the plant could close by 2017 unless it cuts pension costs and got government support."

Irish junior doctors to strike

Junior doctors in Ireland have resumed plans for a strike after a breakdown in talks with employers over excessive working hours.

Junior doctors have demanded in negotiations with the Health Service Executive (HSE) to be paid triple time for any hours worked in excess of a 24-hour shift. The strike is likely to cause widespread disruption in public hospitals.

The day of action was deferred last week to allow further talks with the HSE.

The Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) wants an end to shifts of over 24 hours and clarity on how the HSE will meet its commitment to ensure no doctor works longer than 48 hours a week by the end of next year.

"Currently, junior doctors work weekly shifts averaging 60 hours and have been known to reach 100 hours in some locations," said the Irish Examiner.

A proposed strike on September 25 was adjourned at the request of the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) to allow further talks between the HSE and the IMO, which has a paper membership of around 2,000 junior doctors.

Cypriot nurses may strike over cuts

Nurses may call a strike vote over “dissatisfaction with a finance ministry proposal to abolish allowances for those working in state hospitals during afternoons, Sundays and on public holidays,” according to the Cyprus Mail.

The proposal was highlighted during a meeting between civil servants’ union PASYDY and the finance ministry.

“We are waiting for a second meeting to see what the final outcome will be. If it is negative then we will ask the nurses to vote on a strike,” union president Prodromos Argyrides said.

“Because of the large amount of concern we have seen due to emails, telephone conversations and on Facebook, we decided to visit the hospitals in person and talk directly to the nurses,” said Argyrides.

“The union is only asking to be heard. We would like to have a dialogue with the ministry and for it to consider our side while making their decisions,” Argyrides said.

Allowances for shift work were put in place in 1989 following a 17-day strike. Nurses have already accepted a 30 percent cut in their wages and a 15 percent cut on the amount they receive for extra work on afternoons, Sundays and national holidays.

Africa

Nigerian universities face paralysis

Members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) working in public universities have been on strike since July 1 over the government’s refusal to implement a previously agreed pay structure.

On Monday Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) also came out on strike over the federal government’s non-payment of their August salaries. From yesterday staff organised by the Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions (NASU), were due to come out on strike over the same issue. The combined joint action is expected to bring many university institutions to a standstill.

South African brewery workers strike

More than 2,000 employees of SA Breweries (SAB) represented by the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) came out on indefinite strike on Monday. They are seeking a 9 percent pay increase across the board. Employers are offering 7 percent with a split of 60 percent of this going to an across-the-board settlement and non-guaranteed 40 percent to be paid as performance pay.

The FAWU leadership have arranged a series of rallies including at Cape Town and Durban.

Strike by South African postal workers likely

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) last week declared a dispute with the South African Post Office after its demand for a 10 percent pay increase was answered by the employer’s 6 percent. It is now gearing up for a strike.

The union is waiting for the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) to issue a certificate of non-resolution prior to beginning a strike.

South African car retail workers dispute enters fourth week

The strike by car retail workers, which includes petrol forecourt attendants and car component manufacturing workers, is now entering its fourth week. Together with a previous strike in the auto manufacturing industries, this led to a 75 percent drop in the export of new cars last month.

Representatives from the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) together with those from the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI) met Labour Minister Mildred Oliphant on Tuesday in an attempt to reach a settlement.

The RMI have come up with a new offer, which would give component manufacturing workers a 10 percent pay increase in the first year followed by 8 percent in the following two years. Other motor retail workers would receive 1 percent less for each of the years.

NUMSA shop stewards were due to consult members on the new offer, but the strike will continue in the meantime.



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